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for
RHODE ISLAND
MANAGEMENT

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Meeting Challenges In Human Resources Management In The Coming Decade

As we begin the final decade of this century, speculating about the immediate future is a trendy preoccupation for many, including Human Resources (HR) professionals.

Leading HR practitioners and personnel management scholars were recently asked to single out what they believe to be the most important trends and issues facing the workplace in the next ten years. Here are some of their thoughts.

- An increase in Congressional intervention in the employee benefit field and the tax treatment of employee benefits seems likely.
- Elimination of the mandatory retirement age may have profound effects beyond health and pension programs.
- Federally mandated family leave will result in alteration of employers' family leave policies, and employee benefit items in federal budget reconciliation bills will call for review and revamping of various employee benefit plans.
- Labor reform legislation that will reduce management rights and advance the position of labor unions will be introduced.
- Environmental and safety issues will be expanded and will result in greater attention and support in those areas.
- More protection of employer rights by the Supreme Court.
- Emerging labor shortages will be one of the more compelling problems for employers during the 1990s. In some labor markets such as Boston and cities in the South, severe shortages already exists, and employers are taking some drastic steps to fill the gap. Employing people with disabilities, trying to entice older workers back into the labor market, increasing women's participation in the labor force, hiring ex-offenders and immigrants from poorer nations — all will change the character and direction of the workforce and call for aggressive new HR strategies.
- As the composition of the workforce changes, cultural diversity will create new tensions and new problems in the workplace.
- A substance abuse and drug-free workplace will remain a thorny issue for some time to come. Balancing the right to privacy and the rights of employees with the need to create a safe and secure environment will remain a challenge for HR professionals.
- Spiralling medical costs remain one of the largest employer expenses with no relief in sight, despite cost-containment efforts. No relief can be expected until the country's healthcare system is

changed, according to experts, and they predict that "some form of national health insurance will be inevitable during the 1990s."

• Employee retirement programs are also in for an overhaul. Some see a trend toward "defined contribution type programs that would give employees a vehicle for saving for postretirement medical and life insurance on a pretax basis during their working years, but with the employer providing the retiree with a postretirement program on a self-liquidating basis."

• Since family responsibilities and problems often spill over into the workplace and affect an employee's job performance, employers will have to find more flexible ways of scheduling work to permit employees to handle their home duties. Childcare and elderly assistance are other means of alleviating work/family conflicts that may become more prevalent.

• The current division of time off with pay is expected to be discarded in most workplaces. Instead of vacation days, holidays, sick days, and so forth, employers will offer employees a specified period of time off with pay. With this type of system, an employee will be given, say, 20 days of personal time, and that time can be used for any purpose including sickness, care of others, vacation and so forth. The amount of time off granted can continue to be adjusted for length of service, and employees can be allowed to accrue time off for future needs. With this type of system, employees are not forced to lie in order to justify time off, and less abuse of the system is likely. Moreover, increased productivity can be expected.

• Employees not only seek more balance between work and family life, but also want more control over their own careers. Human resources professionals are likely to be called upon to create programs that permit individual career planning. At the same time, employers will increasingly need to ensure that they have a well-trained workforce capable of moving into positions as they open up.

• Organizations will have to have strong and proactive succession-planning processes and support systems. "The vitality and success of all organizations will be tied to their ability to identify, develop, and retain critical developmental activities (significant long-range functions), and will require effective tracking and analysis systems to support the process."

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Meeting Challenges (continued from page 1)

• Experts in the field of employee training state unequivocally that "we can say goodbye to training as we know it." They foresee employers during the 1990s placing emphasis on training senior executives in addition to middle managers and frontline employees. The development of interpersonal skills for all employees will also come in for its share of attention. These skills have proved critical to the long-term success of quality improvements and other organizational change efforts. If people cannot communicate effectively with each other, they cannot serve the public very well. In the 1990s, continual retraining and relearning of skills will be the norm.

• Because of the changing and more demanding requirements for skilled employees, it will be necessary that the highest levels of HR be tied into the overall strategic planning cycles. "Too often, HR is excluded from major decisions affecting the organization," experts say.

"The HR function has been given responsibility for the management of the organization's most costly and valuable asset — the employee.

"To fulfill that task in a cost effective manner, HR management must be integrated more fully into the decision/planning process. Moreover, given the likely complexity of human resources management during the coming decade, practitioners need to be better cross-trained in the increasingly legalistic issues that they are likely to face on a day-to-day basis.

• The rapid changes in technology will require employees to reskill themselves more often during their worklife than ever before.

"The HR function will be at the center of developing methods to keep employees adaptable to meet needs and to control costs associated with restructuring and staffing changes."

• The development of Human Resources Information Systems (HRIS) and their maintenance, will fall within the human resources unit. "Increasingly, more information systems expertise will be necessary within the HR division," say the experts.

The trends of the 1990s for Human Resources management outlined in this article are not the product of self-proclaimed seers peering into a crystal ball. They are rather, well-defined trends that are *now* developing or *have* developed to the extent that they are already altering the climate of State Governments.

Demographic, economic and technological changes pose challenges for Rhode Island State Government to manage its public workforce in a changing work environment. A rational, systematic response to change is always necessary to assure quality and productivity in government services.

To meet these changes occasioned by the interaction of powerful economic and social forces, it is imperative that State Government review and reorder its workforce goals. It is clearly evident that in the coming decade we will be required to do more with less.

Rhode Island State Government is under pressure to deliver more and better services with ever more constrained resources. This pressure will force State Government to become intensely concerned with the productivity (maximizing outputs relative to inputs) and the innovativeness (finding new ways to solve problems with existing resources) of the workforce. In the pursuit of optimum productivity and innovation, Rhode Island State Government will need to attend to a number of broad issues.

• Labor shortages, already mentioned earlier in this article, will increase competition with other public and private sector employers for skilled employees. Consequently, the State will need to become more strategic and innovative in its efforts to attract and retain workers.

• Since organizational goals and workload far outpace its resources, the State will need to become more strategic in its use of human capital. This entails better human resource planning, more flexible deployment, and greater coordination across organizational lines.

• Changing workforce characteristics and technological change will present new communication challenges within the organization.

• Government is presently challenged to keep pace with new technology. Modernization of work processes will affect not only the types of job skills needed, but also worker norms and attitudes, and management structure and function.

• Successful management of change will require long-term focus. This is contrary to a tendency of government to manage on a year-to-year basis.

• Labor shortages, the declining skill level of new workers, and the rapidity of change in workplace technology all require the State to maintain the competency of its labor force through intensive training and retraining.

• Government and other institutions (labor, private business, and academia) must grow more interdependent, leading to greater cooperation.

• State Government will need to devote attention to improving its public image in order to attract qualified personnel.

The Division of Human Resources advocates that the State manage its personnel from a broader perspective than is now the case. In particular, a single employer (Rhode Island State Government) focus is needed in conjunction with department management.

To meet these challenges, the Office of Personnel Administration (OPA) proposes the creation of a research and development unit to continue and expand upon the work of the Policy and Program Review Unit (PPRU). The PPRU has already documented how well State Government has functioned in the past, but changing times and environment require a change in organizational structure. Creating a planning unit offers an opportunity to retain the best, and reorient, redesign, and restructure where necessary to insure that Government is on track for moving into the future.

There is a need for a Workforce Planning Unit (WFPU) as the interaction of powerful economic and social forces alter the climate of State Government. OPA is seeking to develop greater sophistication in tracking and interpreting the trends outlined in the opening part of this article, that will bear directly on its future capacity. The WFPU would make recommendations to ensure that State agencies have an adequate supply of workers and managers with the proper skills to provide high quality service.

When original goals or the workload outpace resources, it is essential to make strategic use of those resources that remain. To streamline efficiencies, the Office of Personnel Administration (OPA), or the State agencies must first develop a state assessment and maintain it through annual reporting. To do this, OPA must develop greater sophistication in how it uses its human capital. This entails:

- better human resources planning
- more flexible development
- greater coordination across organizational lines.

Workforce planning would involve systematically monitoring and anticipating worker supply and demand and adjusting development and recruitment strategies with due consideration to the demand for public goals and services.

The Workforce Planning Unit would be structured to provide a useful framework for addressing the vast human resource concerns confronting the State. Its primary mission would be to:

- establish and maintain management information and demographic analysis
- develop a strategic state human resource plan and facilitate the effective work of others
- communicate demographic management information to departments/agencies to encourage leadership in instituting changes in their local human resource management system to prepare for a changing workforce and workplace
- to promote forums for discussions on the issues of a changing workforce and workplace
- develop a human resource training program, inclusive of training manuals and related materials.

The Workforce Planning Unit would be established without additional funding or additional personnel. This can be achieved through reorganization and reallocation of duties, and development of a strategic plan for carrying out the mission statements.

The Workforce Planning Unit would also provide a philosophical base that may be expressed in the following "Guiding Principles":

- Rhode Island State Government, as one of the major employers in the State, should strive to be the model of a modern workplace.
- Regarding the management of its human resources, State Gov-

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ernment must present itself as a single employer, while at the same time ensuring agencies sufficient autonomy to pursue their separate missions effectively.

- Collaboration and cooperation among the various parties involved in shaping the State's human resource policies — including the unions as well as business and education — is critical.

- The State must formalize and communicate to employees and the public an organizational culture that is rooted in a commitment to people. That culture must view State personnel as valued employees regardless of their line of work; treat them with dignity and respect; and reward them in an appropriate manner for their service.

- Rhode Island State Government must continue its goal to achieve a workforce that is representative of the population, and it must adjust to the increasing cultural diversity among employees that this implies.

- Human resources planning must be fully integrated through an effective liaison structure and overall strategic planning, including the budgeting process.

- Greater flexibility throughout the State's human resource management system is needed to enhance job security, productivity, and the quality of services delivered.

- Rhode Island State Government benefits and compensation policies must assure that the State can meet its recruitment, retention, and reward-for-performance objectives. To this end, they must effectively balance workers' needs with the State's ability to pay.

- Accountability to the public, measured in both quality and productivity, must be a paramount concern of the State's human resources management system.

Creating a Workforce Planning Unit (WFPU) would also be important symbolically, reflecting our philosophy, our values, and our interest in managing change through effective management of information, and expressing in a tangible way, our concern about employment security and flexibility. Moreover, this step is an appropriate policy response to the challenges of the changing workforce and workplace of the 1990s.

Take Care of Yourself

RHODE ISLAND DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH



Do your health a favor. Walk instead of drive those short distances.

HANDLING AN OSHA INSPECTION

Is your shop the type that is subject to periodic announced or unannounced inspections by OSHA representatives? If so, do you and your managers know how to conduct yourselves during such inspections? Here are a few tips that may smooth the way for you:

- **Check the OSHA inspector's credentials.** — At the onset of an inspection, the OSHA compliance officer usually presents his credentials. If credentials are not displayed, request and inspect them before you permit the compliance officer to conduct an inspection.

- **Find out the reason for the inspection.** — Ask the inspector why the inspection is being conducted. If it was prompted by an employee complaint, get a copy of the complaint. With knowledge of the conditions giving rise to an OSHA complaint, management can correct problems that may have been overlooked or give priority to matters not previously considered important.

- **Accompany the inspector.** — A management representative should accompany the inspector at all times during his tour of the premises.

- **Take notes.** — The management representative must take comprehensive and accurate notes that include, at a minimum,
 - Areas and sections visited
 - Names of all individuals participating in the inspection; and
 - All comments made by the compliance officer about conditions observed on the tour.

- **Answer the OSHA inspector's questions.** — Answer all questions posed by the compliance officer, but avoid volunteering unrequested information.

- **Allow interviews with employees only under certain circumstances.** — Permit the compliance officer to interview nonsupervisory employees only when necessary, and then only if the discussions do not take the employees away from their work stations or otherwise interfere with the performance of their regular job functions. If the compliance officer wants to conduct extended employee interviews, suggest that they be scheduled off state property during the employees' own time.

- **Avoid staging.** — Do not stage operations just so that they can be inspected by the compliance officer. Permit inspection of only those operations that normally take place at the time of the inspection.

- **Do not discuss corrective measures.** — Avoid commitments or promises to the compliance officer regarding corrective measures. Such statements could establish an unfavorable precedent for your agency.

ISSUES

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PERSONNEL SHOP TALK

Employee newsletters, meetings, and bulletin boards are the most popular means of communicating information about management decisions, employee benefits, or organizational activities, according to a *Personnel* magazine survey of 154 human resources managers. Ninety-six percent of the respondents (148) use bulletin boards, 94 percent (144) conduct meetings, and 79 percent (106) publish newsletters to convey information to employees. The survey also found that:

- Bulletin boards are used primarily to announce job openings. Of the 148 respondents who use bulletin boards as a basic employee communications tool, 30 percent use them to post job openings. Fourteen percent use bulletin boards to inform workers about changes in employer policies or procedures, 9 percent use them to post legally required notices about equal employment opportunities and wage and salary information, and 8 percent use them to advise workers of organization and community activities.
- Meetings are held regularly at 50 percent of the surveyed organizations. Quarterly (30 percent) or monthly (32 percent) meetings are most common.
- Topics usually discussed at meetings with employees include benefits and policies (32 percent), the state of the organization (17 percent), procedures (6 percent), and budgets or employee safety (4 percent each).
- Besides newsletters, the most common written or visual forms of employee communication include newspapers (22 percent) and magazines (15 percent).
- Information about promotions and new hirings is conveyed by 54 percent of the respondents through employee publications, most often news releases and memos.
- Attitude surveys are conducted by 36 percent of the surveyed organizations, of which more than eight out of ten share results with employees.
- Internal communications systems are rated "above average" by 36 percent of the Human Resources managers and "average" by 42 percent.

CULTIVATING COMPUTER COMFORT

Computers are here to stay, so it is up to managers to help their employees learn to live in harmony with their new office mates. Back discomfort, fatigue, and eye strain are among the problems encountered by workers who sit at computer terminals for a significant part of the day. However, with a few simple adjustments in employees' work stations and in their work habits, these problems can be alleviated to a large degree.



Managers should tell employees to listen to their bodies and to respond accordingly. Here are a few common-sense tips to help employees cope with computer-induced aches and pains:

- Roll a small towel up until it is four to six inches thick and place it in the small of your back. This will provide lower back support and reduce back strain.
- Adjust your chair height so that weight is shifted forward off your spine and your arms are at desk level.
- Move around periodically to relieve muscle tension.
- Leave your feet flat on the floor to promote circulation in your legs. If your feet don't reach, use a foot rest.
- Blink often — especially important for contact lens wearers.
- Adjust your terminal by tilting the screen for modifying the lighting to reduce reflection and glare.

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Deferred Compensation — an employee benefit with far-reaching advantages . . .

State employees can save for the future by participating in the deferred compensation program, a way of putting money aside without having to pay taxes on it, or the income it earns, until retirement when your tax rate is usually lower. Managers can assist their employees in learning more about deferred compensation by showing them an audio-visual presentation that clearly explains the deferred compensation program. To arrange to show this slide-tape production, call the Employee Benefits Section, Office of Personnel Administration at 277-3160.

This newsletter is sponsored by the state's five carriers of the deferred compensation plan.

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